

Your Family's Health

Make a Difference at Your Family Reunion

Questions and Answers About the Kidneys and Kidney Disease



What to ask your doctor or health care provider:

1. Based on my medical and family history, am I at risk for kidney disease?
2. Would lowering my blood pressure help reduce my risk of developing kidney disease?
3. Do my blood and urine tests show signs of kidney disease?
4. How can I prevent or control kidney disease?

What is kidney disease?

Your kidneys (two fist-sized organs located in the lower back) keep you healthy by filtering waste and extra water from your blood, which then leaves the body in urine. Kidney disease results from damage, over time, to the tiny structures inside the kidneys that filter the blood. When the kidneys are damaged or diseased, they slowly stop doing their job and waste builds up in the blood, damaging the body.

If kidney disease is not treated, it can lead to kidney failure. This means the kidneys stop working. Once the kidneys fail, a person must either begin dialysis or get a kidney transplant.

Am I at risk for kidney disease?

You are at risk for kidney disease if you have:

- Diabetes OR
- High blood pressure OR
- A family history of kidney disease (your mother, father, sister, or brother had kidney disease or kidney failure).

If you have any of these risk factors, talk to your doctor or health care provider about getting tested!

Diabetes and high blood pressure are the two leading causes of kidney failure. Managing these conditions well can help reduce the stress on your kidneys. Talk to your doctor or health care provider about getting tested for kidney disease and steps you can take to protect your kidneys.

How do I know if I have kidney disease?

Testing is the only way to know if you have kidney disease. Simple blood and urine tests can detect kidney damage. Kidney disease often has no symptoms until just before the kidneys fail. Don't wait for symptoms!

What if I have kidney disease?

If tests show you have kidney disease, you can take simple steps to protect your kidneys from further damage. There are medications you can take and other things you can do—like controlling your blood sugar and keeping your blood pressure below 130/80—to help delay or prevent kidney failure.

Is the amount of water you drink related to kidney disease?

Many people wrongly believe that not drinking enough water causes kidney disease, or that drinking a lot of water will prevent it. Kidney disease is not related to the amount of water you drink. Diabetes and high blood pressure are the leading causes of kidney disease. The best things you can do to protect your kidneys are to 1) take actions to prevent high blood pressure and diabetes, 2) manage these conditions if you already have them, and 3) get tested if you are at risk.

For more information, visit www.nkdep.nih.gov or call 1-866-4-KIDNEY (454-3639).